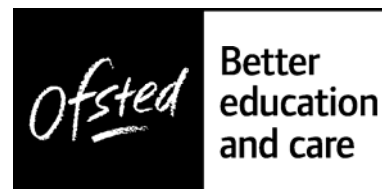


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4 January 2006

Mr Buckle and Mrs Adams
Joint Acting Headteachers
William Gilpin CE Primary School
Pilley Hill
Boldre
Lymington
SO41 5QG

Dear Mr Buckle and Mrs Adams,

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WILLIAM GILPIN CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 13 and 14 December 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in May 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

I observed the school at work, scrutinised documents and interviewed you, two governors and representatives of the local authority and the diocese. I examined a range of the pupils' work and spoke informally with teachers, other staff, pupils and some of the parents.

Context

The school is in a small village in the New Forest. The number of pupils has risen in the last few months to 90; many of the pupils come by car from outside the immediate area. Standards on entry to the school are average. The percentages of pupils entitled to free school meals and who have special needs are below average; the school is currently making very good provision for a pupil with severe learning difficulties who has a statement of special educational need.

Shortly after the inspection in May 2005 the headteacher resigned, and the local authority appointed an experienced recently retired headteacher for three days a week to lead the school jointly with the senior teacher. During this visit, a temporary teacher was covering the absence due to illness of the teacher responsible for the infant classes.

Achievement and standards

The high standards of the 2004 test results were broadly maintained in 2005 with all the infant pupils attaining at least Level 2 in reading and mathematics. At the end of Year 6 there was an improvement in the percentage of the pupils attaining Level 4 in English and science, with a slight fall in mathematics. More significantly, the achievement of the pupils, measured by the progress they had made since the previous formal assessment, was above the national average at both key stages. At Key Stage 2 the value-added measure put the school in the top 10 per cent nationally in English. In the lessons observed, standards were at or above the national average.

Personal development and well-being

The attitudes of the pupils to the school and their studies are very good. Behaviour is very good and there have been no recent exclusions. Attendance is well above the national average. The pupils enjoy their work. They follow instructions cheerfully and have a good sense of safety and mutual care. The older pupils are particularly sensitive to the needs of the younger pupils. They talk sensibly about healthy lifestyles and enjoy the improved diet available at lunchtime. The assembly, taken by the local vicar, was an example of the good links between the school and the village. Recently, a lot of effort has been put into improving the safety of the site and raising awareness of health and safety issues. The very old hut used as hall accommodation is in a poor state and, because of the single-skin wall and condensation, is unfit for physical education activities during cold weather. The potential health and safety risk in using this space for whole-school gatherings and dining is, however, well managed: for instance, by providing carpet squares for the pupils to sit on during assemblies. The temporary acting head has brought valuable experience to health and safety issues, which are now very well in hand. Overall, the care of the pupils is very good.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Remove weaknesses in the arrangements for the care and health and safety of the pupils - good progress.

Quality of provision

All the teachers were observed teaching their classes. The quality of the teaching and learning was consistently good and the pupils were making good progress. In the mixed-age classes, the older pupils were challenged sufficiently and the younger pupils helped to meet the high expectations of the whole-class sessions. In their group work, good planning by the teachers ensured that work at an appropriate

level and pace was provided for the range of ages and capability in the class. However, the effectiveness of the learning support assistants varied quite a lot. The assistants made a valuable contribution when supporting the pupils doing group work, but in two of the lessons, the learning support assistant was inefficiently deployed when sitting with the pupils listening to the opening part of the lesson. In the sessions at the end of the lessons, some very good assessment practice was seen. Very good questioning directed to chosen pupils drew a response demonstrating the extent of learning overall and progress in the lesson. The school does not yet record attainment and progress electronically or set individual targets but the teachers know their pupils very well.

The range of subjects covered is broad and balanced, but the indoor facility for physical education is unsatisfactory. This is limiting the breadth of the education that the school should be providing. There is a good, well-maintained playing field and adequate playground area with a good range of playground activity markings and equipment. The parents in a recent survey expressed the wish for more extra-curricular activities, especially sport. There is an attractive range of books in the corridor library and in class bookshelves. The range and quality of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment is not as good as in most schools. The temporary acting head has been dealing with this issue very effectively, and funds have been committed for a substantial improvement.

Leadership and management

The local authority, supported by the diocese and the governors, moved decisively after the May 2005 inspection, and the headteacher resigned. The acting headteachers, with the support of local authority advisers, produced an improved action plan with a clear set of objectives, a realistic time line and affordable costing. The acting head, with recent experience from another school, has also done some very good work updating policies and advising the governors on the establishment of a committee structure, terms of reference and areas of accountability. The acting headteachers have introduced monitoring of teaching and learning, with extensive feedback. Good continuing professional development opportunities are now provided. Judgements, moderated by local authority advisers, are accurate and a good basis for identifying further training needs.

The governors are fully committed to the school and visit regularly. They took some time to adjust to the implications of the May 2005 inspection. However, with the help of the acting headteacher, the governor support services of the local authority and the diocese, they are now aware of all of their responsibilities. They have a very useful list of routine items to be covered at various times of the year. The chairman has a very good system for dealing with comments and complaint. He answers the parents' questions fully and takes action promptly. Parents have welcomed the increased frequency of newsletters and many of them look forward to the school updating its website and communicating with them by e-mail.

A new headteacher has been appointed from January 2006. There is now good capacity for the leadership and management of the school to continue improving.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Improve the quality of leadership and management of the headteacher – good progress
- Improve governance – satisfactory progress
- Strengthen the partnership between parents and the school – good progress.

External support

The school, prior to the May 2005 inspection, was one of very few of the authority's schools that did not subscribe to the adviser support scheme, and routinely received only one short visit each year. The local authority registered some concerns before the inspection but, while standards were above average, did not place the school in a category for enhanced support. The governors were not entirely surprised by the inspection findings; they had some concerns after the performance review process. Since the inspection the school has been receiving extensive and good quality support. The local authority's action plan is good; it is clear, challenging and realistic. Their immediate response in finding an experienced head to be in the school for three days each week has worked very well. The diocese has been rather slower coming into the picture, but is now giving good guidance and support.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- The local authority and the diocese to maintain regular support for the governors and the new headteacher
- Improve the buildings, as a matter of urgency, both to satisfy health and safety requirements and to enable indoor physical education
- Improve ICT facilities, both for administration and to support learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Winchester.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pipes
Additional Inspector